



COMPANY CAN'T DELIVER ON \$30M FEMA CONTRACTS

Bronze Star LLC, a Florida firm formed by two brothers in August, reached deals to provide emergency tarps and plastic sheets to Hurricane Maria victims in Puerto Rico. But the company had never previously won a government contract or delivered tarps or plastic sheeting. FEMA ended up terminating the contracts without paying any money, and residents are still without supplies. **Nation, 2A**

American Stage giving back

On Giving Tuesday the theater announces that starting Jan. 1 it will admit theatergoers younger than 20 at no charge. The initiative, the Under 20 Free Passport, is part of the theater's effort to survive and thrive by engaging youth. **Local, 1B**

It's finally time to hang up whistle

Eric Newman got into refereeing in 1972. He has officiated plenty of football games, from youth leagues to high school varsity. Now he's decided that it's time to walk away. **Sports, 1C**

Get the solution for picky eaters

Are you tired of fighting with your kids about the foods they eat? We have ways to connect with them and make dinner a more relaxed environment. **Taste**

Grammy nominees coming our way

The 2018 nominations were released Tuesday, and Florida has already seen multiple acts play concerts in Tampa and Orlando this year. But if you missed them have no fear, there are many more Grammy nominees you can catch in the coming months. **Etc., 2B**

TODAY'S WEATHER

Mostly sunny

8 a.m. 65° Noon 79° 4 p.m. 81° 8 p.m. 72°
10% chance of rain
More, back page of Sports

tampabay.com

Follow the Buzz

Stay up to date on the latest news and events related to Florida politics at tampabay.com/florida-politics/buzz/.

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Vol. 134 No. 128
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ON TAMPABAY.COM THIS MORNING AND COMING SUNDAY IN THE TIMES

the girl in the window 10 years later



Tampa Bay Times

FLORIDA'S BEST NEWSPAPER

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Tip stirs police activity



OCTAVIO JONES | Times
Tampa police Chief Brian Dugan talks to media about Tuesday's events.

After seizing a gun, police are optimistic of a tie to Seminole Heights.

BY JONATHAN CAPRIEL AND HOWARD ALTMAN
Times Staff Writers

TAMPA — A McDonald's employee handed a manager a gun Tuesday afternoon and then left the Ybor City restaurant to visit an Amscot, a co-worker said. When the employee returned, Tampa police were waiting. They took him to headquarters

Added grief

The sister of a Seminole Heights murder victim is now dealing with her husband's death. **Local, 1B**

to ask about the gun and were soon proclaiming optimism about the ongoing hunt for the Seminole Heights serial killer or killers.

"We have the person down at headquarters and we are talking to them now," police Chief Brian Dugan said at a hastily called news conference. "They are not under arrest and they are not in custody."

Dugan did not characterize the agency's interest in the man, who was not identified by police. The chief did

not say whether the man was believed to have direct or indirect knowledge of the killings, or any knowledge at all.

But, he added, "Yes, I believe this has to do with Seminole Heights."

Officers used crime scene tape to block off a red Ford Mustang parked near the McDonald's.

» See **TIP, 6A**



EVE EDELHEIT | Times

Chris Ingerson moves trees to be trimmed at Gallagher's Pumpkins & Christmas Trees in St. Petersburg on Tuesday. Owner David Gallagher said he has paid about 15 percent more for trees this year.

EARLY DOES IT IN SEARCH FOR TREE



GABRIELLA ANGOTTI-JONES | Times

Barbara Hofeltz, manager at Winterland Christmas Trees in Tampa, makes a wreath using Fraser fir branches.

A national Christmas tree shortage with roots in the recession sends prices up.

BY KATHRYN VARN AND PHILIP MORGAN
Times Staff Writers

Johnny and Kathy Schultz perused the artificial tree displays at Lowe's, eyeing the preadorned lights and glossy price tags with careful consideration.

Choosing a manufactured tree in the air conditioning of a big-box store was new for the couple. Since they were married 26 years ago, they've been Real Tree people, enamored with the smell.

But this year, they arrived at their usual lot to find a price increase from the previous year that made Johnny Schultz turn around and walk out. The couple had heard about a Christmas tree shortage on the news.

» See **TREES, 5A**

Homes trend: steady gains

Bay area sales will edge up and prices will climb in 2018, a U.S. outlook says.

BY SUSAN TAYLOR MARTIN
Times Senior Correspondent

With data on millions of homes nationwide, the folks at Realtor.com think they have a pretty good idea of how the real estate market is doing.

So here's their prediction for the Tampa Bay area in 2018:

Sales, up 1.3 percent.

Prices, up 6 percent.

That's not as good as in 2016 or even in the first part of this year. But it's certainly not bad.

"Tampa Bay is not expected to have incredibly brisk sales growth, but 1.3 percent is a pretty healthy market from the sales side," Danielle Hale, Realtor.com's chief economist, said in a phone interview Tuesday from New York. "Price growth is slower than you've probably seen in the last year, but it's still faster than normal."

Among the nation's top 100 housing markets for 2018, Tampa Bay ranks 29th — below Daytona Beach, Lakeland, Miami, Orlando, Jacksonville and Sarasota, but above Cape Coral and Fort Myers.

"Even though (several Florida markets) ranked ahead," Hale said, "we're talking about fractions of a percentage, so it's really not that big of a difference. The whole Florida area is expected to do quite well."

For its 2018 housing forecast being released today, Realtor.com — an online company that operates under license from the National Association of Realtors — rated the

» See **HOUSING, 7A**

Teachers take their salary protest outside

Hillsborough educators limit their workload to only official duties while fighting for raises.

BY ANASTASIA DAWSON
Times Staff Writer

TAMPA — Students weren't the only ones dawdling Tuesday morning outside Westchase Elementary School, idling away the minutes before the tardy bell would ring in another day of classes.

The 30 or so Westchase teachers seen drinking coffee and chatting before class are among

hundreds of teachers across Hillsborough County protesting a planned salary freeze by "working the contract" this week — performing only the duties officially required of them in their employment contract with the school district.

Unlike their massive protest earlier this month at a School Board meeting, teachers didn't hold handmade post-

ers or urge passers-by to join in protest chants outside the building. Instead, the quiet cluster of teachers outside Westchase let their absence from the classroom do the talking.

"Anybody in public education gets in it to do the job for the kids, not to make money," said Missy Keller, an organizer with the teachers union who was at Westchase early Tuesday to lend support to the teachers as they answered questions from parents and talked with administrators. "It is very unnatural for

them to work contractual hours. They're so accustomed to going above and beyond."

Keller, a former educator who has spent 12 years working in Hillsborough schools, said the union's actions are meant to urge district officials to honor a pay plan that calls for a \$4,000 raise for roughly one-third of district teachers. Under the plan, salaries remain the same for three years then increase in the fourth if the teacher earns at least a satisfactory rating every year.

» See **TEACHERS, 5A**



MONICA HERNDON | Times

Teachers gather at a protest outside Westchase Elementary in Tampa on Tuesday as salary negotiations continue.